

## **Milton Avery**

(American, 1885-1965)

### ***Putnam's Pond*, 1941**

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eli Luria, 2002.68

In the 1930s, Avery developed a figurative approach that, in its simplification of form and use of heightened color, resembled that of Matisse and the Fauves. This landscape is titled after his friend, the artist Wallace Putnam and his picturesque studio and home called “The Ice House,” situated next to a pond in Yorktown, New York. Putnam and his wife, the photographer Consuelo Kanaga, regularly hosted visits from Avery and other artists, such as Mark Rothko, to their idyllic retreat. Guided by his intuition for forms, rather than their outward description, Avery captures the simple pleasures of this sunny scene of outdoor leisure. Rigorously flat in accordance with modernist doctrine, the composition also welcomes the whimsical effect of cartoonish details, such as the curly hair of the paddling poodle, and the smoother fur of the seated golden retriever. The dog’s erect tail also humorously alludes to what one imagines might be the erotic response of the centralized nude male bather to this pastoral scene.

# **Milton Avery**

(American, 1885-1965)

## ***Sitter by the Beach*, 1944**

Watercolor and gouache on paper

Museum purchase, Acquisition Fund, 1956.12

## **Yasuo Kuniyoshi**

(American, 1893-1953)

### ***Weather Vane and Sculpture Cast*, 1933**

Charcoal, crayon and Chinese white on paper

Museum purchase, American Deaccession Fund, 1989.22

This charcoal drawing echoes Matisse's use of charcoal with its soft smudging and erasures that resemble incised lines, as if scratched into the surface of the drawing. Is there, perhaps, a residual echo of Japanese monochromatic ink painting in the drawing's overall aesthetic? This is the perpetual question when regarding the work of an immigrant artist like the Japanese-born Kuniyoshi, who consciously assimilated to Western Modernist ideals during a period of xenophobia between the World Wars. The subject relates to that of the large oil painting on view in Preston Morton Gallery nearby, which includes the weather vane in the shape of a galloping horse, various types of fruit, and the same hollowed out plaster seen from the back. The drawing provided the model for a poster to advertise a show for the Society of Independent Artists in 1934. Kuniyoshi's choice to use an oval format, whose edge is conspicuously transgressed by the tail of the centralized horse and the bottom edge of a pear, echoes the proclivities of his School of Paris predecessors, Picasso and Braque.

# Yasuo Kuniyoshi

(American, 1893-1953)

## ***Tight Rope Performer***, 1936

Lithograph, edition of 100

Lent by the U.S. Government, Federal Art Project

The circus performers of French avant-garde artists like Manet and Picasso likely inspired Kuniyoshi's series of lithographs treating subjects like this one. Kuniyoshi's performers are typically young women with dark hair, almond eyes, and voluptuous proportions. Though not clearly identifiable, their Asian ethnicity remains a possibility. One wonders if Kuniyoshi's own ambivalence towards his status as a Japanese immigrant, who regularly experienced discrimination, may be reflected in the melancholic isolation that these single figures often radiate. In this image, the performer balancing on her tiny feet could easily be read as a metaphor for Kuniyoshi's own balancing act in his efforts to rise in the art world, which culminated in the first retrospective of a living artist presented at the Whitney in 1948.